

What We May Face Ahead, Part 1 - Acts 18:1-6 – December 28th, 2008

- In chapter 17, we left the Apostle Paul in Athens on this, his second missionary journey where he will now leave for the city of Corinth.
- In chapter 18, we will see him spend a year and a half in Corinth, before he begins what is now called his third missionary journey.

- I always marvel at how alive and even active God's Word is even when it records Paul's mission trip to Corinth, some 2,000 years ago.
- What I find so interesting is how that the information in Acts chapter 18 has such profound implication and application to us now.
- What Paul faced in Corinth after leaving Athens has striking similarities to what we may face in the New Year after leaving 2008.

- This will be part one of a study titled; "What We May Face Ahead." I would like to take a closer look at Paul's experience in Corinth.
- Not only are their similarities between what Paul faced and what we may face ahead, but Corinth looks very similar to our world today.
- As we examine these similarities, I pray that the Holy Spirit will really minister to us from this passage, so as to ready us and steady us.

1. It could be very difficult (Verses 1-3)

1 After this, **Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.** 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, **he stayed and worked with them.**

v1 After leaving Athens Paul arrives in the major port city of Corinth, which was known for its gross hedonism and extreme immorality.

v2 In Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla who had recently been ordered out of Rome by Claudius because they were Jews.

v3 Paul goes to see them, and because they were in the same line of work as he was, he both stays with them and works with them.

- It's remarkable that Paul would even go to Corinth. By any stretch of the imagination, this would've been an extremely difficult place.
- One commentator said of Corinth; "none but the tough could survive." Corinth was steeped in the worship of the sex goddess Aphrodite.
- Because of this, it had a reputation for unimaginable sexual immorality, so much so that they would call immoral people "Corinthian's".

- In Corinth stood a temple dedicated to Venus. At night, 1,000 prostitutes would offer themselves sexually in worship to this goddess.
- This sort of explains why the Apostles two letters, by the Holy Spirit, to the Corinthians are written the way they are in their content.
- It may also explain the content of Romans chapter one, where, to this church, he writes how God gave them over to their sexual sin.

- So why would Paul go to such a place? One reason is because of the need as a commercial center with two harbors close to Athens.
- This would be the perfect place to plant a church because people from all over the Roman Empire would travel through Corinth.
- While it may be the perfect place to plant a church, it certainly would not be an easy place to plant a church. This will be difficult.

- It's also interesting to note that Paul worked hard with his side job of making tents in order to provide income to support his ministry.
- While Paul had a Biblical right to be supported financially, he didn't want to exercise this right with this difficult church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 9:7-12a 7 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk? 8 Do I say this merely from a human point of view? Doesn't the Law say the same thing? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned? 10 Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because when the plowman plows and the thresher threshes, they ought to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest. 11 If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? 12 If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? NIV

- It's almost as if the Apostle Paul is shaming the church in Corinth. What he says next gives us the impression that he's quite upset.

1 Corinthians 9:12b-18 But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Don't you know that those who work in the temple get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar? 14 In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel. 15 But I have not used any of these rights. And I am not writing this in the hope that you will do such things for me. I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of this boast. 16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. 18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. NIV

- Paul had truly counted the cost in planting this church in Corinth. He knew it wouldn't be easy, and was prepared to do whatever it took.
- If he would have sought the easy road, he wouldn't have gone to Corinth, and we wouldn't have two books in the Bible as a result.
- What blessings have we missed, when under the banner of ease and comfort we avoid difficulty in our insatiable pursuit of "happiness?"

"That we are born to be happy is scarcely questioned by anyone. No one bothers to prove that fallen men have any moral right to happiness, or that they are in the long run any better off happy. The only question before the house is how to get the most happiness out of life. Almost all popular books and plays assume that personal happiness is the legitimate end of the dramatic human struggle. Now I submit that the whole hectic scramble after happiness is an evil as certainly as is the scramble after money or fame or success.... How far wrong all this is will be discovered easily by the simple act of reading the New Testament through once with meditation. There the emphasis is not upon happiness but upon holiness. God is more concerned with the state of people's hearts than with the state of their feelings. Undoubtedly the will of God brings final happiness to those who obey, but the most important matter is not how happy we are but how holy."

A.W. Tozer, "Of God and Men," pp. 48-49

2. It could be hard financially (Verses 4-5)

4 Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. 5 When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

v4 We're told that each Sabbath, he went to the Synagogue to reason with and persuade both his Jewish brethren and Greeks as well.

v5 It's interesting that Paul doesn't specifically preach that Jesus was the Messiah until Silas and Timothy arrive from Thessalonica.

- One thought is that Paul was encouraged and even emboldened by them being there with him, and their financial support for him.

"The arrival of his colleagues did a number of things for Paul. It relieved him of the anxiety he felt for his Thessalonian converts. A gift of money he received at this time from his friends at Philippi enabled him to give up his secular employment and devote himself full time to his missionary work. Moreover, the presence of Silas and Timothy gave him much needed moral support. As a result, Paul threw himself with even greater zeal into the task of winning Jews to Jesus. Now more boldly than ever he urged the Jews to consider the claims of Jesus to be Israel's true and only Messiah."

John Phillips "Exploring Acts" p. 357

2 Corinthians 11:7-11 7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? 8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. 10 As surely as the truth of Christ is in me, nobody in the regions of Achaia will stop this boasting of mine. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! NIV

3. It could be met with opposition (Verse 6)

6 But when **the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive**, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

v6 After hearing Paul declare that Jesus was the Christ, the Jews not only opposed him but were verbally abusive to him. (Blasphemed)

- Paul's response to this is to shake out his clothes in protest saying that "their blood is not on his hands. He's clear of his responsibility.
- He then goes on to say that from now on, he will go to the Gentiles instead of the Jews. Why is Paul seemingly being so harsh to them?
- I suggest to you that Paul is keenly aware of God's Word to the prophet Ezekiel. God was holding the prophet personally responsible.

Ezekiel 3:16-21 16 At the end of seven days the word of the LORD came to me: 17 "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. 18 When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 19 But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. 20 "Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sin. The righteous things he did will not be remembered, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. 21 But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took warning, and you will have saved yourself." NIV

Acts 20:25-27 25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. NIV